Mill Valley, Calif.

Murder By Decree?

By Richard Raznikov

Author's note: It has been several years since the last Pacific Sun *article on the Kennedy assassination. While critics of the government's official theory of the case — that the President's death was the result of a lone gunman and that there was no conspiracy — had essentially destroyed that fiction, they had reached a dead end. Proof of conspiracy, even of Oswald's innocence, had been established; yet two seemingly insoluble problems remained: First, it was a practical impossibility to pin the murder on specific conspirators; second, the "best evidence" of Kennedy's wounds — the official autopsy report of Naval pathologists Humes, Boswell and Finck — was strongly at odds with virtually every other piece of evidence. And while the logical inference seemed to be that these men had lied, it was extremely difficult to prove it.*

Now, everything has changed. In a stunning new book, Best Evidence *(Macmillan Company, 700 pp.), one of the most respected and meticulous of researchers, David S. Lifton, has uncovered what appears to be the truth. It is less complex and more terrifying than anyone had suspected. The importance of Lifton's work cannot be exaggerated. He has made it imperative that both critics and supporters of the government's case rethink all assumptions. And what he has found supplies the missing piece to the puzzle, enabling us to understand how crucial evidence was made to seem contradictory. In most respects, including the identity of key participants, the case has been solved. The following account is necessarily abbreviated, since Lifton's proofs are more detailed and substantial than can be recounted. Interested* Sun *readers should read the book themselves.*

The autopsy room at Bethesda Naval Hospital was crowded. In addition to the three Naval pathologists, Commander James Humes, J. Thornton Boswell and Pierre Finck, and medical technicians and a photographer, the room overflowed with high military brass. Humes, who led the autopsy team, carried on what one observer later recalled as a "tense" running conflict with his superiors, Admiral C.B. Holloway and Captain James H. Stoner Jr.

Also present were two agents of the FBI, Francis X. O'Neill and James W. Sibert. The subsequent report, FBI Report 302, turned in by Sibert and O'Neill, captured the comments and discoveries of the autopsy team. Somehow, Report 302 was not seen by the Warren Commission and was omitted from the 26 volumes published by the Commission as Testimony and Exhibits.

The five-page, single-spaced Sibert/O'Neill report was not overlooked by the critics. However, with attention centered on the events in Dealey Plaza, Lee Harvey Oswald's background (and CIA connection) and the outright lies of various government agencies, the enormous significance of the report went unnoticed for years. It was used primarily to help demolish the government's absurd lone assassin theory, since it contained an admission by Humes that the wound in Kennedy's back had a depth of less than the digit of his finger. Because the government posited that this wound was one of entry, with the bullet exiting the President's throat, then causing several wounds to Texas Governor Connally, and because this theory was necessary to minimize the total number of shots (and suggest no more than one gunman), the report numbered 302 was evidence of conspiracy.

But except for Lifton, no one else understood how additionally significant and chilling the Sibert/O'Neill report was. As he read the report for perhaps the tenth time, Lifton was struck by two paragraphs which had eluded everyone else:

"The President's body was removed . . . and was placed on the autopsy table, at which time the complete body was wrapped in a sheet *and the head area contained an additional wrapping which was saturated with blood.*

"Following removal of the wrapping . . . it was apparent that a tracheotomy had been performed *as well as surgery of the head area, namely, in the top of the skull.*"

Surgery of the head area? In the top of the skull? This was clearly impossible. The Parkland doctors in Dallas had performed no surgery of the head. No one had touched the President's head, certainly not with a surgical instrument. What could this mean?

Discrepancies between the observations of the doctors in Dallas and the findings of the Bethesda pathologists had been seized on by critics for several years; they said it meant that the pathologists were lying. The government, through the Warren Commission, had ignored the differences. To them these discrepancies simply reflected the usual misperceptions of eyewitnesses, and it was the Bethesda autopsy report, as a document which measured the President's wounds in detail, that was the "best evidence." The Parkland doctors were simply wrong.

LIFTON BEGAN TO CHART the differences in what Parkland personnel said and what the Bethesda doctors reported. It didn't take long for him to realize that these discrepancies represented something more than erroneous observations.

Eight doctors and five nurses had examined Kennedy at Parkland Hospital. Their statements were, in

A new look at the wounds

According to the government, President Kennedy sustained the following wounds:

(a) A wound in his back, at the base of the neck and slightly to the right of the spine; this is officially a bullet entry wound.

(b) A wound of entry in the occipital region of the skull, and a corresponding massive exit wound across the entire right side of the skull.

(c) A wound in the anterior neck; this is officially a bullet exit wound.

To accept the government thesis, one must accept the following:

(a) That a bullet struck the President at the base of the neck, leaving no apparent path; this bullet angled upward and exited the front of the throat, subsequently veering to the right in order to penetrate Governor Connally's back, slightly to the left of the right armpit, then angling back to the left, collapsing the governor's lung, shattering a rib, blasting a hole in his chest, piercing his right wrist and breaking the radius in the wrist, then entering his left thigh. This bullet allegedly then fell onto a stretcher at Parkland Hospital and was to become Exhibit 399, the "Magic Bullet," which the government says caused all of these wounds yet remained pristine and undeformed;

(b) That a bullet struck Kennedy in the back of the head and blasted out a massive portion of the skull.

According to David Lifton's thesis, Kennedy sustained the following wounds:

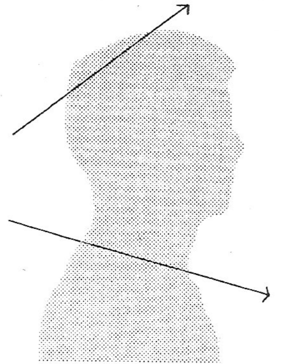
(a) A wound in his back, about six inches below the base of the neck; this was a "created," artificial wound, punched out after death;

(b) A wound in the occipitoparietal region of the head, along the right side of the skull; this wound was caused by a gunshot which struck the President from the front. It measured only about twenty percent in area of the wound when seen by Bethesda doctors;

(c) A wound of entry in the anterior neck region; this was a bullet wound caused by a shot from the front.

Lifton's thesis explains that four shots, at a minimum, were fired: two from in front, both of them striking the President, and two from behind (with Oswald's rifle). The shots fired from the rear caused Connally's wounds and a slight wound to a spectator (James Tague) from a shot which missed the motorcade.

Lifton's work has the advantage of taking all available hard evidence into account, medical reports, ballistics, eyewitness accounts and the Zapruder film. It is at least partially substantiated by testimony of acoustics experts who, analyzing a tape of an open police microphone from Dealey Plaza, told a House subcommittee that four rifle shots can be distinguished. This means conspiracy.



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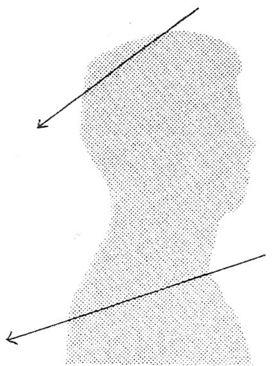

Conspiracy version

all material respects, identical: Each described the anterior throat wound as one of entry; each estimated the wound in Kennedy's head as being five by seven centimeters (two by two and three-quarters inches) and said it was located in the occipitoparietal area (at the back of the skull, along the right-hand side); none of the 13 saw a wound in the back, nor a wound in the back of the head below the larger wound; each remembered the tracheotomy incision as being of standard length — two to three centimeters.

Lifton began thinking the unthinkable: Someone had taken the President's body from the casket and altered it.

The Bethesda findings were startlingly different. According to the autopsy report upon which the Warren Commission based its "lone assassin firing from behind" theory, the throat wound was one of exit, not entrance; the head wound was at least 13 centimeters across, with an overall area *four to five times* greater than that described at Parkland, and was located across the entire right side of the President's head, from the occipital area across the parietal, and extending into the temporal area including the forehead; two wounds of entry in the back, missed at Parkland, were present at Bethesda — puncture-like wounds of identical shape; the surgical incision at the throat was measured at seven to eight centimeters in length.

Lifton wondered. The members of each of the two groups were in agreement — among themselves. One group, either all of the Parkland doctors or all of the Bethesda doctors, had to be wrong or lying — unless something heretofore unimaginable had happened. Two groups of doctors were describing entirely different wounds; it was hard to believe that either group had been unable to measure what it saw.

Lifton returned to the behavior of Humes at Bethesda. As he looked at the body for the first time, Humes remarked that there had been surgery at the top of the head. He passed on to the throat wound, believing it at that time to be simply an abnormally large tracheotomy. He probed the back wound to a depth of less than an inch. In the early morning hours of the following day, he burned his preliminary autopsy notes and first autopsy draft in his fireplace, an extraordinary procedure that he was never called upon to explain.

Critics had long characterized this behavior as plain evidence of complicity, but they had missed something: a portion of the testimony of Parkland's Doctor Malcolm Perry which suggested just how far from honesty the entire autopsy process had traveled.

Humes placed two telephone calls to Perry in Dallas on the day after the assassination. According to Perry, "He asked me at that time *if we had made any wounds in the back.*"

The government's claim was that Humes, *at first* puzzled by the absence of a path for the back wound, had learned *during* the autopsy that the anterior wound existed beneath the tracheotomy incision, and had thereupon concluded that the bullet which entered Kennedy's back had then exited his throat. By his call to Perry, Humes demonstrated that far from believing

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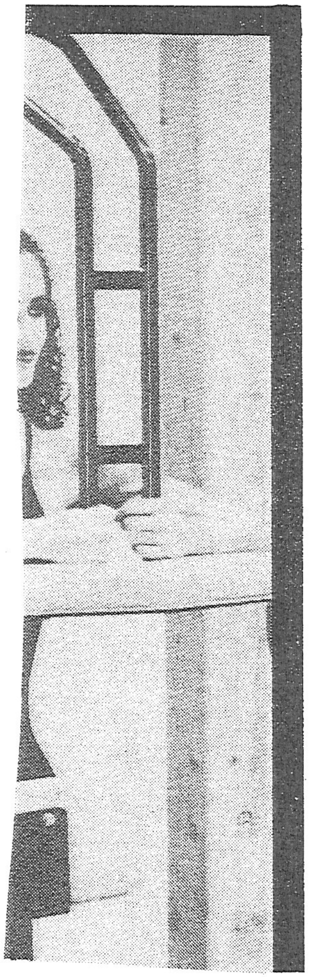

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in this idea he actually entertained the thought that the wound in the back *was not made by a bullet*.

At Parkland, eight qualified doctors described wounds in Kennedy consistent with shots fired from in front, even though Oswald was allegedly firing from behind, unaided. They observed *no* wounds susceptible to a different interpretation.

At Bethesda, three pathologists (none of whom had *ever* performed an autopsy in a case of death by gunshot), described — or at least hypothesized — wounds consistent with shots fired from behind. While Parkland's Doctor McClelland saw a "gunshot wound of the temple" as the cause of death, Humes and his associates saw no entry wound in the temple, because when they saw the body the temple was partially obliterated in the massive head wound.

Lifton saw what all of this appeared to mean. He tried to find alternative explanations, however hard to swallow, but at last began thinking the unthinkable: Someone had intervened between Parkland and Bethesda; someone had taken the President's body from the casket and altered it, so that the wounds described at Bethesda were simply not the wounds as they had been caused by gunfire. It explained not only the conspiracy but the modus operandi of the conspirators.

If Oswald's rifle was to be fired at all, it had to be fired from behind, so as to implicate the patsy. It was a defective weapon (the manufacturer had ceased putting them on the market over 20 years before) that had wholesaled for two dollars. Better rifles had to be used, but they could not be fired from behind; what if bullets remained in the body? But shooting the President from the front made it possible both to catch him in a cross-fire, minimizing the chance of failure, and to effect a trajectory-reversal *after* he was dead. Digging out any fragments that didn't correspond with Oswald's rifle was an absolute necessity unless the FBI was involved, because their laboratory would find out that more than one rifle had been used.

But in digging out bullets or fragments, one hole or another would have to be enlarged. An exit wound cannot be made smaller to the naked eye, but an entry wound can be made to appear to be a wound of exit. Thus any shot hitting Kennedy from the front could be recovered by going into the body from the front, enlarging and obscuring the entry wound to make it consistent with a shot from the rear.

LIFTON STUDIED HUMES' TESTIMONY in volume two of the Testimony and Exhibits. He consulted medical textbooks. Finally he began phoning neurosurgeons. To these doctors he read portions of Humes' description of the wounds, without identifying the body concerned. Each told him the same thing: It sounded as though there had been "exploratory surgery," or that *an autopsy had already been performed*. One doctor, a Los Angeles neurosurgeon, said he "could see why (Lifton) was puzzled; (Lifton was) not describing a gunshot injury . . . That brain's been sectioned."

Sectioning is done when the brain is cut into, to expose the interior and thereby facilitate inspection. Humes had testified to deep "lacerations" in Kennedy's

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Almost immediately, Lifton ran across a bizarre problem. Sibert and O'Neill, notified by J. Edgar Hoover to meet the plane at Andrews Air Force Base and accompany the body, had reported helping to carry it through the back entrance of the building at 7:17pm. At that point, and for 45 minutes afterwards, they had been barred from the room by Naval personnel and the Secret Service. It took a call from Hoover himself before the bar was lifted.

Meanwhile, the Honor Guard, which was to meet the casket at the front entrance and escort it to the back, suffered a series of errors before being able to carry the casket through the back entrance at exactly 8pm. No member of the Guard saw any FBI agents or recalled anyone helping carry the casket; neither Sibert nor O'Neill saw any members of the Honor Guard.

As Lifton pieced the story together from interviews with members of the Guard, it became plain that something peculiar had occurred. The Guard at first was ordered to follow an ambulance to the rear of the building; this was shortly after seven o'clock. En route, the Navy ambulance attained speeds of up to 50 miles per hour, and the Guard lost it. Returning to the front, the Guard was again ordered to the rear, where it found a Navy ambulance parked — and empty. Again, it returned to the front entrance. Finally, after returning once again to the rear, the Guard caught up with the ambulance. This time there was a casket inside, Kennedy's fancy $4000 model. At this point the casket was taken into the building and the morgue.

TO COMPLICATE MATTERS, it developed that the first ambulance — which had eluded the Guard — was driven by none other than Admiral Galloway, the chief medical officer of Bethesda. How could this be explained? Was the Navy having a union problem?

Lifton spoke with members of the Guard. It had been explained to them afterwards, they said. One of the ambulances had been a "decoy," to mislead the press and public. They had simply followed the wrong one. Two ambulances had been used, identical gray Navy vehicles. This seemed to Lifton a transparent excuse. There was no need for a decoy. At the same time, it provided time for Kennedy's body to be replaced in the coffin before it was opened. It gave possible conspirators a "window" in which to make the necessary switches while the Honor Guard was "lost."

Still, he needed more proof. Assuming that the casket, which had arrived at the front door at 6:55 with the motorcade, was empty, where had the body come from? Where and when had it been brought to Bethesda to be reunited with the casket? Then, Lifton found Dennis David.

David had been "Chief of the Day" for the Medical School at Bethesda that day. He described to Lifton how the casket had arrived and how he'd called on "seven or eight" sailors to help unload the coffin. David recalled no FBI men *nor* Honor Guard. Moreover, he said, the casket *did not arrive in either of the gray Navy ambulances, but in a black Cadillac hearse!*

Lifton wondered just how many vehicles had been used. This made three. One of the Navy ambulances had held the expensive casket. What, he wanted to know, had the black hearse contained? David replied that it had held a plain, cheap gray metal casket, and brain, including a "parasaggital laceration" six centimeters deep and running the entire length of the head. He had described other injuries as well — injuries, the neurosurgeons had assured Lifton, that could not have been caused by bullets but which were completely in harmony with surgery during an autopsy. Or surgery to remove the brain itself from the skull; all of the connective tissue had been severed. If someone wanted to remove the brain and extract bullets, that's precisely what he would do.

It wasn't that Humes lied. He didn't have to. The Commission personnel who heard or read his testimony understood nothing of the technical material. Only a surgeon would have been suspicious. It was no surprise to discover, in the Sibert/O'Neill report, that "inasmuch as no complete bullet . . . could be located in the brain area (nor) in the back or any other area of the body . . . the individuals performing the autopsy *were at a loss to explain why they could find no bullets.*" They certainly must have been.

Humes, who had never performed this type of autopsy and is not a forensic pathologist, found himself called in on the murder of the President. He knew on first seeing the body that something was amiss, but his superior officers were standing over his shoulder. As he began to examine the skull, "large pieces of bone fell off" and landed on the floor. In talking with medical personnel present, Lifton established that Humes' superiors were continually hostile to observations he was making, in some cases actually directing him on what his findings would be.

Lifton had convincing evidence that Kennedy's body had been altered somewhere en route to Bethesda, but clearly that wasn't enough. He would have to establish the logistics. If the body *had* been removed, it would then have had to be replaced. On the record there was a substantial time lapse between the arrival of the expensive casket at the front door of Bethesda hospital and the beginning of the autopsy — a lapse of 65 minutes. But surely there would be witnesses. It was inconceivable — and unacceptable — that no one could establish the movements of the casket during those 65 minutes.

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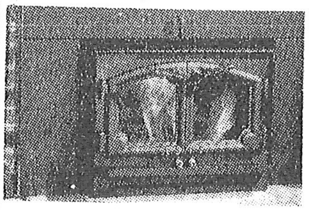

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that Kennedy's body had been inside.

He didn't know when it had arrived, David said, but it was about 30 minutes before the motorcade got there. *Before?* Lifton asked, "How do you know that the black Cadillac got there before the Kennedy ambulance arrived at the front, if you're at the back?"

"Okay, I see what you're saying," David answered. "After I was down at the (back), after the black hearse was there, then I went back up to the front . . . to the commanding officer's office on the second floor . . . The second floor is kind of on a balcony; and there's a couple of offices . . . I was in the office, and was standing there looking out toward Wisconsin Avenue, when the motorcade with the Navy ambulance in the lead came in the front gate . . ."

David told Lifton that when the hearse arrived it was greeted by "all the senior officers . . . and the Chief of the Army and the Chief of the Air Force medical departments were already there, at the morgue."

The presence of the top brass when the President's body first arrived at the morgue — in a cheap metal casket, not the expensive model — in a black Cadillac, not a Navy ambulance — meant complicity. It meant that they *had* to know. It explained Humes' predicament; it explained the conflicting stories between Parkland and Bethesda; it explained why no bullets were found in the body; it explained why Naval personnel had been threatened with courts-martial if they spoke. It explained everything, but it needed confirmation.

Two X-ray technicians, Edward Reed and Jerrol F. Custer, had participated in the autopsy. Custer told Lifton that he'd been sent from the room several times in the "custody" of a Secret Service agent, to take X-rays upstairs for processing. On his third trip, Custer was at the front of the medical building when he saw the official motorcade arrive and Jacqueline Kennedy enter the hospital. This corroborated David's story: Kennedy's body was already at Bethesda before the official motorcade, before the "official" casket accompanied by Mrs. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy arrived.

Had the autopsy actually begun *twice?* If David and Custer were to be believed, Humes and Boswell had received the body in the presence of top military officers at about 6:30 and had actually begun the autopsy. Yet at eight o'clock the Honor Guard had carried in the expensive coffin bearing Kennedy's corpse, and another autopsy had officially begun. For this to have been true, witnesses to the first autopsy must have been fooled about the second, while witnesses to the second must have been misled about the first. Lifton had to learn how this happened.

> ***The Pentagon was an active participant in the conspiracy, along with high-ranking officials of the Secret Service.***

THE TIMETABLE MADE SENSE: A cheap metal casket containing Kennedy's body arrives at Bethesda at about 6:30. Humes and Boswell begin work; the brass is present, X-rays are taken. At 7:17, Sibert and O'Neill bring in the fancy casket but are barred from the autopsy room for what might have been 45 minutes, until a phone call from Hoover gets through. The casket brought in by the FBI men is empty. While they are kept from the room, Sibert and O'Neill are prevented from witnessing the transfer of Kennedy's body back into the casket they've accompanied, and the transfer of that casket back into the gray Navy ambulance. Shortly after the transfer, the Honor Guard "finds" the ambulance and carries the casket into the morgue for the eight o'clock autopsy.

The question was, how could the technicians, who were present at the first autopsy, be kept in the dark about the second? As Lifton discovered, it was easy: they were all sent from the room, accompanied by Secret Service agents; in fact, the anteroom to the morgue was occupied by agents who handled a manifest with people's names, checking them in and out. Two technicians reported later that they were *prevented from leaving* the autopsy room by agents during the 7:15 to 7:30 period, and *directed to leave* sometime prior to eight o'clock. Those who'd been present at the first autopsy session were out of the room while X-rays were taken; then the X-ray technicians left, with only Humes and Boswell, and their superiors present. At that point the casket switch was made. The Honor Guard brought in the newly re-occupied casket at 8pm. They carried it into the morgue, where the body was taken from the casket and placed back on the table. Only at that point did the technicians and new arrivals enter.

In tracking down other medical personnel, Lifton found overwhelming evidence that the body had been brought in prior to the official casket opening at 8pm.

Paul K. O'Connor and James Curtis Jenkins were student interns at Bethesda; they had prepared the

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body for autopsy. Both told Lifton that Kennedy's corpse had arrived in a cheap gray metal casket. Both told him that the body had been encased in a *body bag!* Did they know what a body bag was?

"It's nothing but a rubber bag that bodies are put into, say in a disaster," said O'Connor. "It's a heavy rubber bag with a zipper . . ."

At Parkland, Kennedy's body had been placed in the casket wrapped only in a sheet. There had been no body bag. There had been no "additional wrapping" of the head, as Sibert and O'Neill described it in their report. Lifton got confirmation of the body bag story from Floyd Albert Reibe, the photographer's assistant.

There was still a missing piece to the puzzle. Lifton could show beyond a reasonable doubt how the President's body — the "best evidence," in the words of Warren Commission lawyers — had been intercepted between Parkland and Bethesda, how surgery had been performed to alter the wounds and, in all probability, to remove bullets and/or bullet fragments, as part of the pre-assassination plan, how the body had arrived at Bethesda before the casket which was supposed to contain it, and how the body could have been replaced without most witnesses being aware of the fact.

But where had the surgery taken place? Lifton isolated two time periods during which the corpse was in the sole possession of the Secret Service, both times aboard Air Force One. The body was either removed from the plane before take off or hidden aboard in the body bag and removed quickly upon landing. Either scenario is possible.

If the body was taken off at Dallas, it could have been operated on and then flown to Washington aboard Air Force *Two*, which left Love Field about 45 minutes *after* Air Force One, but which "leapfrogged" it and arrived in Washington *before* Air Force One. Lifton believes in an alternative: that the body, in a rubber bag, was taken from Air Force One upon landing and transferred immediately to a waiting helicopter which flew to Walter Reed Army Hospital near Bethesda; such a helicopter did take off within a minute of the landing of Air Force One; adjacent to the plane, it had no ascertainable function.

While some details have not yet been resolved, the case has essentially been solved. All of the necessary elements are now either known or provided for: We know what happened in Dealey Plaza; we know how Oswald was framed; we know what the Parkland doctors saw and what the Naval doctors saw; we know that agencies of the government of this country participated in a cover-up of the truth; we know there was — and still is — a whitewash of the murder of John F. Kennedy.

We now know, too, as a result of Lifton's findings, that the Pentagon was an active participant in the conspiracy, along with high-ranking officials of the Secret Service. These two entities controlled the body, the autopsy, the bullet fragments and the President's clothing. The Secret Service planned the motorcade route and provided "protection" for the President. Without their participation, there could have been no assassination, and certainly no successful cover-up.

The conspiracy did not need the FBI or the Warren Commission, because the "best evidence" was actually manufactured. It misled the FBI and the Commission — and the critics. Now, their cover has been blown. Now, we are far closer than before in getting to the bottom of this madness. It remains to be seen whether the Congress and the people are simply too tired, too disillusioned or too frightened of what it means. Some of the men who planned the murder of a President are still alive, and could be prosecuted. In any event, it is fatuous to talk about democracy in this land if we are unwilling to publicly acknowledge the truth about John Kennedy's assassination.

Marin joins Diablo protest

People in Marin are seriously concerned about the licensing of the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, as evidenced by a vigil held outside PG&E's San Rafael office last Monday. The vigil was held in conjunction with other actions around the state, as advocates of safe energy from various community groups joined together with Abalone Alliance of Marin to show public opposition to the licensing and operation of the newly constructed plant in San Luis Obispo.

No sooner had PG&E received its low-power test license in mid July than the Diablo Canyon plant staff flunked its first security test, when Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) officials smuggled two handguns into the containment building. This test failure is delaying issuance of the license to operate for one to two weeks.

Security hearings held in May by the NRC were closed to the public. NRC seismic hearings, held May 19, forbade public testimony and denied intervenors (including Governor Brown) the right to call witnesses and examine evidence. This in spite of the fact that the reactor is located only 2 1/2 miles from a major earthquake fault, which was discovered after the plant was designed.

An investigation by Dr. Clarence Hall, head of UCLA's Department of Geology, found that the Hosgri fault near the plant is capable of a quake larger than Diablo Canyon was designed to withstand. According to a 1976 internal memo made public by the *Los Angeles Times*, the NRC was reluctant to deny Diablo an operating license "because of the large financial loss involved and the severe impact such an action would have on the nuclear industry."

What about the financial loss to the people who live near Three Mile Island? They have already paid $263 million because of that accident, which will cost $2.8 billion in total. Rancho Seco nuclear power plant outside of Sacramento is a twin to TMI, and the entire county of Marin is within the evacuation area. Since Rancho Seco opened in April, 1975, it has closed over